A TRUE STORY OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC IN 1879-80

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IN

1879–80

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BY

HUGH HASTINGS ROMILLY

'You'll take my tale with a grain of salt
But it needs none nevertheless'

LONDON
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1882

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A TRUE STORY
OF
THE WESTERN PACIFIC.

THE events which I am going to relate occurred, for the most part, in a small island, not known even by name to most people, and only to be found in the largest atlases. Few people know anything of its history, or of the people who dwell there, and yet for more than a year the island has belonged to England, and the government has been administered by an English magistrate. Rotumah, the name of this unknown land, is situated in the Pacific in about latitude 12° south and longitude 177°

east, and is between three and four hundred miles north of the Fiji group. Previous to the date of its annexation to Fiji, it had been the scene of fierce intertribal quarrels and religious wars. Life was unsafe and property insecure, and at length the chiefs of the different tribes recognised this fact, which would never have been acknowledged by the representatives of the antagonistic religious sects. Those chiefs had been engaged in such bitter hostilities that they were anxious for peace, but were unable to establish any form of government for themselves. The island, described later by Lieutenant Bower in an official report to the Governor of Fiji as the 'Garden of the Pacific,' had suffered terribly. The native gardens were neglected, and many of the cocoanut trees, on the produce of which the natives had to depend for their modest

luxuries, were destroyed. Whenever an opportunity offered, the young men deserted their homes and shipped as sailors in any vessel which happened to touch at the island for fresh provisions. It appeared not improbable that, in a very few years, Rotumah would be left in possession of only the old men, women, and children.

The chiefs found themselves unequal to the task of selecting one from their own ranks to enjoy the supreme power, and decided to present a humble petition to the 'Great Queen' to send a white chief to govern their people, and to secure the religious freedom for which at heart they were all anxious.

For this purpose the three most powerful chiefs took the first opportunity of going to Fiji, and in person they presented their petition to Sir Arthur Gordon. They were received

by him on October 25, 1879, with great state, many of the high Fijian chiefs having been invited to attend the ceremony. Sir Arthur sympathised with their difficulties, and promised to forward their petition to Her Majesty. He told them that till the answer should arrive from England, which could not be for six or eight months, he would send a relative of his own, Mr. Arthur Gordon, not to govern them, but to give them the advantage of his advice.

The chiefs expressed themselves much pleased, and on their departure from Fiji they were accompanied by Mr. Gordon, who took with him, as interpreter, an Australian half-caste named Thomas Simpson. I have thought it necessary to give this short account of the circumstances preceding the annexation of Rotumah, in order to

explain the presence of Mr. Gordon and his interpreter Thomas Simpson in such an unknown speck in the Pacific. I followed Mr. Gordon to Rotumah about a month after his departure.

As there are several features of unusual interest in or near the island at places to which we made expeditions during our stay there, and which I have not met with elsewhere, I may as well attempt a short description of them here before beginning my story.

The main island is surrounded with islands still smaller than itself, and each of these is the home of some superstition firmly believed in by the natives. These islets are seldom visited, and with one exception are uninhabited.

The most remarkable among them is one called Hofliué, or as we named it, Split Island, a sketch of which, by

Mr. Gordon, is reproduced on the cover. On approaching Rotumah from the westward, a barren rock, shaped like a turtle's back, is seen standing by itself about four miles from the main land. At that distance you would say there was nothing extraordinary about it, but as you get nearer you see a thin white line completely bisecting it. On a still nearer approach you find out that this line is not a vein of quartz, as you probably have at first supposed, but that what you have concluded to be one island is in reality two, and that the white line is the sky showing through from the other side. The extreme width of this split may be perhaps forty feet, and on calm days it is quite possible to pull through it in a whaleboat. From one point of view, however—the one chosen for the drawing of it in this book—a huge mass of

rock may be seen lodged exactly in the centre of the fissure, about half-way between the top of the rock and the water. The sides of the crack are smooth and perpendicular, like the side of a house, and in some places seem to be polished, and are coated with a semi-transparent grey substance like glass, which chips off easily in thin and brittle flakes. Take away the windows and projecting ledges of an old street in Edinburgh, treble the height of the houses, and for white walls substitute a polished black surface, and you may form a very fair idea of what the island of Hofliué looks like while pulling through its very centre in a boat. Round it there is no protecting reef, and it is only on the calmest days that it can be visited. Even then landing is dangerous work, and a heavy ground swell is never absent.

About fifty yards from shore it is necessary to jump overboard and swim ashore, and you are lucky if you go through this performance with no greater damage than a barked shin. However, the novelty of the place and excitement of landing amply repaid us for our visit.

Not two miles from Hofliué is the island of Hatana. This too can only be visited on the calmest days. It is a small island not more than a mile and a half in circumference, and densely wooded. Round it there is a barrier reef, on which the sea always breaks heavily, and but one place where a landing is possible, though at all times dangerous. At one extremity of the reef is a narrow opening. Every third or fourth wave runs through this channel without breaking, and on the top of this occasional

wave the passage must be made. Everything depends on the experience and nerve of the native in whose charge you have placed yourself. One false stroke, and your canoe would go broadside on into the breakers. The chief of the canoe having watched his opportunity and given the signal, the men bend to their work with a will, not however quietly, as Englishmen would do under the same circumstances, but all talking loudly at the same time. Suddenly the backwash from the preceding wave meets the wave on the top of which you have entered, and immediately every man jumps out of the canoe. Being now in shallow water, just on the edge of a big bank of coral, they plant their feet firmly, and hold on to the gunwale with all their might. When this wave has retreated, they know full well that in all probabi-

lity the next one coming in will break. Accordingly a painful rush is made, stumbling at every step over the sharp uneven surface of the coral. Then, before the next wave has broken, you are in safety, the excitement has passed, and all you have to do is to examine your injuries, pick the bits of coral and spines of the sea urchin out of your feet, and get ashore as quickly as possible to light a fire and dry yourselves. Now also you can admire the magnificent appearance of the waves as they break, from a purely æsthetic point of view, as your former intense, but somewhat too exciting interest in them has been removed. Inside the reef is a shallow lagoon, warmed by the sun to an almost painful heat. It is the home of curiously shaped and gorgeously coloured fish. By the inexperienced European, however, these

wonderful beasts must not be lightly touched, as most of them are armed with poisonous stings. A bad sting, which stiffens your arm for a fortnight, is considered an excellent joke by your native companions. Small houses are built on shore, in which to pass the night. Before going to bed, however, you go out fishing with torches for giant crayfish, with which the reef is infested. The guardian spirit of the island too has to be propitiated. His temple is a small reed hut, inside which is a large stone. Meat offerings and drink offerings are solemnly presented, and then all turn in for the night, not without sundry misgivings as to whether the departure will be so successful as the arrival. What if the wind were to get up or the swell increase? You would then have to stay in your present position possibly for weeks. How-

ever, the next day is even finer than the last, and the awkward exit is made in safety.

One more remarkable, natural feature I will describe. In the very heart of the bush in Rotumah itself is the native 'Hades.' After a very short sojourn in the island our curiosity was sufficiently aroused by the account we heard of it to make us anxious to pay it a visit. It was described as a well with no bottom, into which the souls of the departed Rotumahlis took refuge. No one had visited it for a long time, as the place, according to all accounts, was swarming with 'devils.' When we got to it, not without difficulty, having to cut a road through the bush, we were rewarded by seeing what certainly appeared to be an old well cut through the solid rock. The mouth was much overgrown with shrubs and

ferns. We had brought a sounding line, and the extreme depth we got was eighty-four feet. Of course we determined to make the descent, but as we had brought no ropes, that for the present was impossible. There was a story that two natives had made the descent ten years ago, but it was uncertain whether this was true. Some days after our first visit, a white man living on the island supplied us with a perfectly new manilla rope of exactly the length we required. We then rigged up what sailors would call a 'shear' over the mouth of the shaft. An old block was found, in a native's house, and the rope passed through it. Gordon was the first to go down. The natives lowered him very slowly at first, and he was able to steady himself against the sides with his feet. After a very small portion of the descent had been accomplished the

hole widened considerably, so that he was no longer able to touch the sides with his feet. The rope being quite new, he began to spin round and round with a most unpleasant velocity, and when finally he reached the bottom it was some time before he recovered himself sufficiently to stand up. The rotatory motion produced by the strain upon the stiff new strands of rope had increased so much that we had to lower away as quickly as we dared, fearing he might be unable to hold on till he reached the bottom. However, in a few seconds, he shouted to us that he was all right, and I then made the descent, going through precisely the same disagreeable spinning that he had. We were followed by only four natives. The hearts of the rest failed them, and they preferred staying at the top to pull the rope.

Arrived at the bottom we found that what had appeared to be an old shaft opened out about half-way down into a huge dome, and that it was in reality a cave of very large dimensions which we were in. There were two long galleries at the bottom going in opposite directions, and each one ended in a large dome-like chamber. The place was swarming with bats, and it was merely necessary to whirl one's stick round and round to kill dozens of them. I have before and since explored many caves, but I never saw one in the least degree resembling this.

The ascent was even more unpleasant than the descent. The spinning began immediately on leaving the ground, so that when we arrived at the sharp rocks at the top we found that it was impossible to steer or steady ourselves. We had therefore to undergo

a most severe scraping and bumping over them, but we finally arrived at the top, much pleased with ourselves, but not in the least anxious to make the descent a second time.

To resume my story. When I arrived in Rotumah I found Gordon showing great friendship and consideration for Simpson. Shooting, boating, or fishing, they were always together, and in the evenings Gordon gave him reading and writing lessons, for which Simpson —who will hereafter be called 'Tom'— professed himself most grateful. The house we were then living in was situated at a place called Noatau, the capital of a district of one of the rival chiefs. We were in the habit of living alternately with the two most powerful chiefs, changing almost every week from one end of the island to the other. Alipati or Albert, as he was more

usually named by us—the chief with whom we were most intimate—had not a very magnificent house for us to live in. It was, in fact, in size and appearance exactly like a signalman's cabin on a railway; but both Gordon and myself preferred it to the house, certainly of greater pretension, which we had at Noatau. Alipati's town, Motusa, was situated in a most lovely bay, and was surrounded by a magnificent grove of forest trees, a great relief from the eternal sameness of the cocoanut.

On Christmas Eve Gordon and I decided that we would go to Motusa to spend our Christmas Day with Alipati. We were sure of a good dinner there, that is, we knew that plenty of pork, to the native mind the most delicious of food, would be forthcoming. Our Christmas, however, was not destined to be a very merry one.

In the morning while we were dressing Alipati came in to us evidently much excited about something. He told us that one of his men had been attacked during the night, and that he was so badly wounded that it was impossible he could recover. He told us that the man, a very fine young fellow named Kimueli, had, while asleep in his house, been cut over the head with an eighteen-inch knife or cutlass, that his head had been nearly cut in half, but that strange to say he was not yet dead. We asked Alipati if he had any idea who had done it, and he at once assumed an air of mystery. After repeated enquiries he said he knew who had done it, but even then the information had to be dragged out of him bit by bit.

'Was it a white man?' Gordon asked.

'It was not.'

'A Rotumah man?' said Gordon, 'then.'

'No.'

'Then who was it?' we both said, as white men and Rotumah men composed the whole of the population.

With much hesitation and an evident fear of giving mortal offence by bringing such an accusation against a member of our household, Albert at last said,

'Tom, he kill him.'

It appeared to us then that Alipati had very insufficient grounds for supporting this accusation. No one had seen Tom enter the house or leave it, but footprints supposed to be his were there, leading in and out of it. As far as we then knew we had not sufficient evidence against Tom to warrant us in arresting him, and his former character

and good conduct seemed to make it in the last degree improbable that he should be the culprit. When Gordon and I visited the wounded man Tom came with us. He showed no hesitation in entering the house, and was as calm and indifferent as possible while helping to bandage the man's head. He could not however affect to misunderstand the threatening looks and observations of all around him. We thought it best therefore to get him out of the way for the day, and to collect as much evidence as possible during his absence.

He was accordingly sent for some medicine to our other house at Noatau, a journey which would take him the whole day to accomplish. When we went into the house where the wounded man was lying, his head was bandaged in a peculiar manner with strips of

banana leaves. As this is an important point in my story, it will be as well to describe minutely how it was done. A piece of coarse cloth or calico was over the top of the head, and round it, to keep it in its place, were strips of banana leaves. The whole was secured with cotton and strings of fibre.

After Tom's departure we occupied ourselves in collecting all the facts we could find which bore upon the case. Several houses had been entered that night, and the owners all said it was Tom who had gone into them. In each instance he had lifted the mosquito net to see who was underneath, and the result being apparently unsatisfactory, he had gone on to another house. The first one he had entered belonged to a trader, a white man named Jim McPherson. McPherson said that he had seen Tom take the

knife with which the murder had been committed—and which was afterwards found covered with blood and hair—out of a tree outside the house. The knife belonged to a native who said he had left it that night in the place from which Tom was seen to take it. Tom had got a foot of a very unusual shape, and there were any number of natives who were ready to swear that the footprints, leading in and out of Kimueli's, the murdered man's house, were Tom's. These peculiarly shaped footprints were made evidently by a man running, and led from Kimueli's house along the soft sand of the beach to a place in the bush where they stopped, and where after some search the knife which Tom was known to have taken, was found covered with blood. Two Fijian servants of ours, with whom Tom had to sleep under one mosquito net, said that he had been out all

night and had not returned till cock-crow.

In the course of these investigations our faith in Tom, originally so strong, was growing less and less, till at last it became evident that he must be arrested, a formal investigation made, and that, if necessary, he must be committed to take his trial for murder in Fiji. We had learnt very little of the language during our stay in Rotumah, and the difficulty and absurdity of trying our interpreter where there was no one else to interpret, was at once apparent to us. It would have been simpler to have settled the matter in Alipati's way, who came up to us with a blunderbus loaded to the muzzle, and said:

'Me think very good shoot Tom.'

I said, 'How many bullets have you got in, Albert?'

'Me got seven,' said he; 'suppose me shoot, Tom die very qũick.'

We quite agreed with him that this would be much the easiest way out of the difficulty, but Tom being a British subject could not be dealt with in so summary a manner.

Meanwhile it was time for him to have returned from Noatau, and as he had not come, three men were sent to look for him with orders to bring him back. They found him on a small island, a hundred yards from the mainland. He had not got the medicine for which he had been sent, but he had got a revolver of mine, which he had loaded. As he had no idea that we suspected him when we sent him away in the morning, it was evident that he was uneasy in his mind about something.

Meanwhile Gordon had got a house prepared for him, out of which he could not escape, and Tom was told that he

was arrested on suspicion of the murder of Kimueli. He was perfectly calm, but apparently very indignant, at the treatment he was receiving at our hands, after having served us, as he said, faithfully and well.

I may mention here, though I did not know it for months afterwards, that the inhabitants of Noatau had a standing invitation to picnic with Tom on our best provisions every moonlight night after we had gone to bed. He had certainly courted popularity through the shortest road to the native heart, and it must have been a bitter blow to him to see his friends desert him in his hour of need. Two days after his arrest he was put on his preliminary trial, and much new evidence came out against him. The only point in which the case failed was the possibility of attributing any motive for the murder

of so harmless a man as Kimueli. Months afterwards a very sufficient motive was found, as it was ascertained that Tom had stolen thirty pounds in gold belonging to Gordon, and this money was found hidden in the ground in the corner of the murdered man's house. It is probable that Kimueli knew of Tom's hiding-place, and that he therefore became the victim of his unfortunate knowledge.

We had the greatest difficulty in examining the witnesses, and one woman, instead of kissing the Bible on which she was sworn, insisted on blowing kisses to us with a vacant smile on her face, which was flattering, but not what we wanted; at last the case was finished, and Tom was fully committed for trial in Fiji.

There were, however, no means of conveying him to that place until a

ship should come in. A strong guard was always kept, as the prison was far from safe, but notwithstanding this precaution he managed after he had been in custody for about a month, to make his escape.

One night after we had gone to bed I was roused up by having the soles of my feet tickled. According to native ideas to awaken a chief in any other way would be extremely rude. There I saw Alipati sitting at the foot of my bed, with his gun. As soon as he saw that I was awake he said :

'Tom he run ; me think he kill you and Misa Gordon ; me think he kill me too.'

Though much annoyed at his escape we could not help laughing at Alipati's expectation of a wholesale butchery. It appeared that the guard had gone into a neighbouring house during a tremen-

dous thunder shower, and Tom had seized the opportunity of crawling through a little window in the roof and so making his escape. We sent a search party out immediately, and runners to every village, calling upon the people to arrest him at once should they see him. Alipati loaded his blunderbus in his usual formidable manner, and put himself at their head. He was fully determined to shoot Tom if he got a chance, as he said his presence in the island interfered with his sleep at nights.

However, before next morning the recapture was luckily made without any bloodshed. Tom went back to prison, this time in irons, and we resumed our usual monotonous existence, and waited patiently for a ship. We had not long to wait.

On the 1st of February the 'Thistle,'

a small twenty-ton cutter, was reported at anchor at the other end of the Island. The captain, a man named Evans, of whom I shall have more to say, came up to see us. He said he was on his way to Fiji, but was going to call at Wallis Island and Futunah on his way, and he said that he expected to complete the voyage in three weeks. We at once decided to send Tom in the cutter under Evans's charge, and I decided to accompany him as I was anxious to return to Fiji.

We accordingly made sail on February the 3rd, and I thus undertook a voyage which it was reckoned would take three weeks, but which from various causes took nearly three months.

When we had been a day at sea I found that Evans, who had appeared a respectable man on shore, and who had impressed Gordon and myself rather

favourably, was one of the most notorious characters in Fiji. This information I got from the only other white man besides myself on board, who was on his way to Futunah to settle there and trade.

The ship had been insufficiently provisioned even for the month that they expected to be away from Fiji. Of that month more than three weeks had elapsed, owing to Evans being totally deficient in the art of navigation. He had cleared out of Levuka, the capital town of Fiji, with a white certificated mate, as he was not himself entitled to a certificate; but as the mate was too ill to accompany him, Evans decamped one night with a Malay for mate, who was as ignorant of navigation as himself. How he had ever found Rotumah is a mystery to me.

His crew were composed of New

Hebrideans and Solomon Islanders, and the discipline on board was certainly severe. The slightest mistake was punished in an entirely original manner of his own. He used to assemble the ship's company, the culprit had a rope put round his neck, while the other end of it was passed through a block in the rigging. The man was then hoisted from the deck, Evans by long practice having ascertained the exact amount of strangulation that a man could bear without producing death. I discovered these practices by coming on deck one morning and finding an old man bleeding at the mouth and ears. I intimated to Evans that this form of punishment must not be resorted to while I was on board; and though he informed me that he was captain of his own ship, and should do what he liked, I heard of no more cases.

Evans was a confirmed laudanum drinker, and could with ease take from sixty to one hundred drops. Nearly the whole day he used to be in a state of total or partial stupor. The position in which I found myself was not therefore a very pleasant one.

At Rotumah, where Evans could have got a month's provisions with ease, he had bought absolutely nothing. In a small cutter, with a dram-drinking captain, no one capable of navigating the ship, no one even capable of steering her, for the compass was beyond the intelligence of the native crew, the provisions nearly exhausted, and almost a certainty that we should not find Wallis Island, the prospect was not very hopeful.

At the end of the second day, it was discovered that two of our water casks were full of undrinkable brackish water.

This, however, did not give us much anxiety, for at that time of year heavy thunder showers are very common, and enough water might be caught in half an hour to fill a cask. The weather was terribly hot. I had paid for the use of Evans's bunk, the only one in the ship, but when I saw the stuffy little hole that it was, I preferred living on deck whatever the weather might be. The ship was full of copra, the name for cocoanuts cut into small pieces, and dried in the sun. No one who has not travelled in a copra ship can imagine the peculiarly sickening smell which it has, and as it has also the property of generating heat, especially if not quite dry when stowed, the hold of a copra ship is usually three or four degrees hotter than the air outside. My choice therefore was to sleep in Evans's filthy bunk, down in

the hold with the native crew, on the top of copra sacks, or else to stay on deck and never go below at all. This last alternative in a well found ship would have been the natural thing to do, but in the month of February, which is the hottest month of the year, and the season of calms, without an inch of awning, or the means of spreading one, I used to feel that my brains were melting, and that the arrival of sunset was the only thing to live for. After we had been about three days at sea, we had run the distance between Rotumah and Wallis by dead reckoning, but no Wallis Island was to be seen.

Evans, though he must have known that the island could not be far off, would not alter the ship's course, but insisted with drunken obstinacy on going on. He had not, however, so completely lost his senses as not to

recognise the fact that the provisions were almost exhausted. On the fourth day he took stock of what was left, and one barrel of rice, one tin of biscuits—bad ones of course, crumbling to pieces in the hand and full of weevils—and two bottles of mustard, were the result of his investigation. The crew and ourselves were put on an allowance of about a pound of rice and five or six biscuits a day. The mustard we had the full benefit of, as the crew would not eat it. We found it most useful in disguising the taste of the biscuit. The water also was getting short. Two or three days of calms without rain, which at that time of year was the most likely thing that could happen, would exhaust it. To me the most annoying part was the unnecessariness and stupidity of the whole thing, as any amount of tinned provi-

sions and live stock could have been obtained in Rotumah.

When we had been ten days out, high land was reported right ahead. We were well off for water again, for we had had a day's heavy rain, and by half lowering the main sail we had caught enough to fill two casks. On seeing land, Evans declared at once that he was right not to have altered the course of the ship. The dead reckoning, however, showed that we had run over seven hundred miles, while Wallis was not four hundred from Rotumah. Whatever the land might be, we were all pleased with the prospect of provisioning the ship, never dreaming for an instant that Evans would not put in. When we were within twelve miles, however, we heard the order given 'bout ship,' and Evans announced to me, as a piece of

intelligence, that the land we saw was not Wallis Island at all, and that he intended to sail back over the course we had come, to try and find it. The absurdity of this proceeding was too apparent, as we had hardly any food on board and very little water. He only guessed where he was, and therefore did not know for certain the exact course to steer for Wallis, while behind us we were leaving, as it seemed, our only chance of obtaining supplies and information. Without actual violence, however, I could do nothing. I now looked upon Evans as a madman, and with my white fellow passenger Ferguson, I discussed seriously the advisability of confining him in his cabin and taking the ship back to Samoa, the high land which we were then leaving.

It was, however, very doubtful

whether the crew would support us in this. At all events we decided that we must take our chance, not a very good one as it seemed to us. At the end of a week we had run about the distance by which we had originally overshot our mark. We had had three days of calms and intense heat, Wallis Island was nowhere in sight, and our food was finished. The last of the rice had been stolen by the crew.

We had still a cask of water, without which we should indeed have been in a bad way, for the sun was awful, and we were fated to have two more days' calm. Those two days we spent without any food at all; but on the evening of the second day, Ferguson and I caught a small shark about six feet long. Several sharks had been swimming round the ship, but we had been unable to accomplish the usually

easy feat of catching one, possibly because we had a special interest in doing so. In ten minutes enough shark for all hands was boiling on the fire, and uncommonly good we thought it. Then about eight in the evening, a light breeze sprung up. Evans all the time had been quite indifferent to our condition. We saw very little of him, as he was usually lying in a stupified condition in his cabin. The breeze freshened rapidly, but we did not know which way to put the ship, and Evans did not care. All at once, Tom, who was sitting forward on deck, called me and said:

'Mr. Romilly, the natives say they can smell the land.'

This was a thing new to me then, but one which I have had experience of often since, especially after heavy rain, when a sweet earthy smell can often be

perceived, even when the land is thirty or forty miles off. Accordingly we made up our minds to beat dead to windward, and in the morning we were rewarded by seeing the land right ahead of us, about ten miles off.

We roused up Evans who came on deck and recognised the land at once as Wallis Island. It is a long, low lying island, surrounded by a barrier reef, and with a high conical mountain, evidently an extinct volcanoe, about ten miles inland. Evans brightened up considerably at this sight, and was evidently much pleased at his own firmness in returning. We were too glad to see the island at all, to quarrel with him, but I could hardly realise our good fortune as the chances had seemed so much against us.

By the evening of that day, the 23rd of February, we were at anchor in

a lovely bay opposite a white trader's house, and with the immediate prospect of a 'square meal,' a thing we had not had for some time. Tom, who had, all the time we were at sea, been allowed on deck, was now sent below in irons, and Ferguson and I went ashore to the house of a Captain Hawkins, a capital fellow of whom we shall see a good deal more.

The cutter had very little business to do there, as there were only about six tons of Kava—the root from which the natives make a well-known drink—to be sent on board. Hawkins, a rough old merchant captain, had a nice little house, and was living with his wife and children, trading in a small way in cocoanuts. The natives were a fine light-skinned race, completely under the power of the Roman Catholic Mission, for whom they were always

working without pay, and by whom they were severely punished for the slightest disobedience. They were ostensibly governed by a queen, Lavelua by name, with whom I had afterwards a good deal to do. Both Ferguson and I had fully made up our minds that if Evans intended to go to Futunah, an island about four hundred miles distant, which was part of his original scheme, we would not go with him, but would wait for the next ship which might make its appearance. We had had quite enough of Evans, and were too well pleased to be in comfortable quarters again, to be in a hurry to leave them.

He said, however, that the cruise had already extended itself so much longer than had been expected that he meant to go straight back to Fiji. Fiji was dead to leeward of where we then were,

and we thought it impossible that he could altogether miss so large a group of islands. Accordingly we determined once more to go with him. Our intention, however, received a sudden check in the following manner.

We had been three days at Wallis, and the morning of the fourth day was fixed for our departure. I had therefore gone on board as we were to sail at daybreak, and as it was a cool night I was sleeping in the hold. Under my pillow I had my revolver and the key of Tom's handcuffs.

About midnight, as he told me afterwards—for of course I did not know it at the time—he crept up to me where I was sleeping. He had seen me put the key under my pillow, and he had made up his mind to escape. Evans was on shore, and Ferguson too, and I was the only white man on board.

The thought passed through his mind, he said, of shooting me, as he had no reason to fear that the native crew would interfere in any way; but while he was looking at me, he said, I turned over on my side, and he saw the key under a corner of the pillow. He had no grudge of any sort against me; in fact we had formerly always been very good friends, but he was determined to get the key, to take off his irons, and to swim ashore.

This was now quite easy for him; he possessed himself of the key without waking me, and got an old Line Islander—the same man whom Evans had nearly hanged—to unscrew them. He then left the open irons on the deck, and he and the Line Islander both slipped into the water and swam ashore. Next morning, before daybreak, I was told with absolute indifference, by one

of the natives on board, of what had occurred. I at once went ashore, expecting to have no great difficulty in recapturing him by offering a large reward. I found however many difficulties in my way which I had not in the least anticipated. In the first place none of the natives would speak to me or even look at me. If I went into a house they appeared to be quite unconscious of my presence, and if I addressed a remark to any of them, they would in a marked manner disregard me altogether, and talk to someone else.

This was extremely annoying, as all this time I was wasting precious hours, in which Tom might get off into the interior of the island, and thereby lessen our chance of re-capturing him. I sent a messenger, a servant of Hawkins, to the Queen, asking for an interview.

The answer I received from Her Majesty was 'that there was "no answer."'

Hawkins could not explain this behaviour to me, but promised to try and find out its meaning through his servants. As a last chance I went to the French Priest, who had hitherto ignored my presence in the Island. He was civil, but professed himself unable to help me, as he never interfered in any way with the Queen. In the evening, in a state of considerable dejection, I went back to Hawkins' house to dinner. He informed me that he had solved the mystery. A 'tabu' had been put upon us by the Queen, partly on account of our religion, partly owing to some amusements of Evans's while on shore, but chiefly because Her Majesty had asserted we had come in 'a devil ship.' Hawkins told me that

it would be a most difficult matter to get the 'tabu' removed, but that till it was removed not a single native would stir a finger to help me. No reward would tempt them, for they knew they would not be allowed to keep my money, and that moreover they would incur a heavy fine, or possibly a flogging, for taking it. We could suggest no plan but that of offering the Queen a heavy bribe, but though it was certain that she would eventually accept one, it was equally certain that, for the sake of maintaining her own dignity, she would not see me for two or three days. Of course by that time Tom would be miles away from any village, in the very heart of the Island, where he could easily support himself on wild yams and such like food, which, as an experienced bushman, he knew well how to do. After dinner, however, a

complete change came over the aspect of affairs owing to a simple stratagem of mine, which proved successful far beyond my expectations.

I was a good deal in the habit of amusing myself by playing on the banjo, not a very scientific instrument, but one which is easily carried from place to place. I must also explain that in Wallis Island it was the habit in every village to shut up the unmarried men in one big house to sleep, and the unmarried women in another. After dinner, then, at about nine P.M., when the ladies were all shut up for the night, I took my banjo, and having eluded the man on guard, who had wandered some distance from his charge, I crept into the house. It was only lighted by a smouldering fire in middle of the floor. Disregarding the expressions of astonishment with which

I was greeted, I sat down and began to play a violent hornpipe. The curiosity of the ladies soon got the better of their astonishment and fear, and at last a very stout dame, apparently the matron in charge, jumped up and began to dance furiously. Her example was soon followed by the rest, and presently I found myself seated in the middle of the enormous house, discoursing sweet music to a crowd of some two hundred scantily clad leaping maniacs. I was uncertain how this stratagem of mine would end. It was certain that, for a time at all events, the 'tabu' had ceased to remain in force, but what view the guard would take of my conduct I had not the slightest idea. He, however, had heard the unusual noise, and looking into the house, had come to the conclusion that he was unequal to the situation. He therefore ran up to the

priest's house to give the alarm, and on his return he informed the idlers in the village of what was occurring.

They of course all collected round the house, and to my intense satisfaction I heard repeated roars of laughter outside. The end was not far off. All of a sudden the noise and laughter stopped, and I saw the French priest advancing on me, his face livid with rage. I said—

'Amusez vous, monsieur, ici point d'etiquette.'

He could hardly speak with rage, but as I knew the 'tabu' was in reality his doing, though to me he denied all knowledge of it, I did not care. It was however no good pressing the joke any further, so I got up and left the house, the priest informing me that the Queen should know all about it next day. This was exactly what I

wanted, though I knew that she would hear of it from the natives before the priest's account reached her. I afterwards became very good friends with this priest, who was not at all a bad fellow.

Next morning I was told that I must go and see the Queen at once. I never supposed that she would take a very serious view of my performance, but I was hardly prepared for her intense amusement and delight at the discomfiture of the priest, with whom she was evidently not on very good terms. I made her a present of a very finely woven Rotumah mat which pleased her a good deal, and we began our interview on very friendly terms. She entirely denied having put a 'tabu' on me. I informed her that I had never suspected her of doing so. She did not allude to Tom in any way at

first, but talked a good deal about Fiji. When she heard that I lived with the Governor her civility increased, and it was evident that she meant to make herself as agreeable as possible. At last I turned the conversation in the direction of Tom, and hinted at the large sum of money I was prepared to pay if Tom should be returned to me alive. I told her that he had offended the 'Great Queen,' and must be punished by her. I told her the story of the murder, and hinted at his desperate character and disregard for human life. At this the Queen obviously became very uncomfortable. At last, when I mentioned a sum of money which was a small fortune to a native, she could restrain herself no longer. In three days, she said, heshould be caught. There was no place on the island in which he could escape the eyes of her men. Before evening

every man who could go should have started. In the meantime I was to stay to dinner with her, and accordingly a big feast was prepared, which was conducted in the usual lavish manner, and which all her able-bodied men attended before starting on their expedition. My hopes were now once more raised, and I thought it certain that Tom would be brought in before the three days had elapsed.

The plan of the expedition was to divide all the men into six search parties. They were to start from one extremity of the island and to beat it from end to end. I did not purpose accompanying them myself, as I knew I could be of no use. I therefore returned to Hawkins's house and waited patiently for the result. Alas! the expedition was a failure. They had not seen him. They had however seen traces of him

in the shape of a canoe, hidden in a clump of bushes near the water's edge, and stored with bananas, papawas, and food of that description. This canoe was not touched, but three men were left concealed close by, to keep a constant watch upon it.

I now made up my mind to another course. I determined to send the cutter away altogether and to stay with Hawkins till Tom should be caught. It was probable that he could see her lying at anchor from any of the headlands. If he saw her sail away he might suppose that the search had been given up and might very likely come down to one of the villages, where he would have every reason to suppose that the natives would receive him kindly. Evans consented to carry out his original programme of going to Futunah. After that he was to return to Wallis, and

pick me up, and then go on to Fiji. This would in all probability take three weeks, and by that time I hoped to have Tom once more in custody.

Accordingly, four days after the search had commenced, the 'Thistle' sailed away and I was left alone with Hawkins. The next day I spent deliberating over a plan of action. In the thick jungle, no number of men would ensure his not being passed over without being seen. I knew that Tom was an expert bushman, well skilled in the art of concealing himself. I had had many opportunities of seeing this in our shooting expeditions in Rotumah. I was inclined to do nothing for four or five days, except of course to take care that his canoe should be constantly watched. It was evident that he considered his case so desperate that he meant to adopt a course of action some-

times taken by natives, though seldom successfully, of putting his canoe straight before the wind and running for a neighbouring island. Of course with even a moderate sea he would be swamped, and in a calm he would die of hunger or thirst. The distance also between the islands reduced the chances of success to a minimum. At Rotumah, however, a canoe full of men had arrived from Futunah, a distance of three hundred miles, and it is possible that Tom, having seen these men succeed, had determined to resort to the same desperate expedient. The difficulty, however, was soon solved for me. On the third day after the cutter's departure, I received a message from the Queen requesting me to take delivery of my murderer, as he was then lying bound in her town. She said she was afraid of his

again escaping; no doubt he was bound, but still she was afraid. He had been caught taking provisions to his canoe, had made no resistance, and had evidently suffered a good deal from want and exposure.

When I got to the Queen's town, carrying a large bag full of dollars as the price of his capture, I found that the Queen's fears as to his escaping again were groundless. His body, arms and legs were bound round and round with vines, which were cutting into his flesh. He was suffering great pain from his swollen limbs and cramped position. When I came in he smiled and tried to put out a hand to shake hands. He said, 'It's been no use, Mr. Romilly.'

I thanked the Queen for her trouble, and paid her the money. Her eyes glistened, but she took it with apparent

indifference. I then had the vines taken off, and had Tom washed, and his chafes attended to. His wrists were too swollen for me to put handcuffs on him, so I had a stout canvas strap sewn above the elbows, with his arms behind his back. I then rode back to Hawkins's house while he walked by my side. I told him that I was going to mount guard over him while he was on shore, and should have no hesitation in shooting him if he again attempted to escape.

In Hawkins's house was a little room leading out of the sitting-room, with only one door in it. This was the store, where he exchanged his calico and knives for the natives' cocoanuts. There was a counter in it supported by two stout stanchions. On the floor of this room I made a bed for Tom, putting his legs round one of the stan-

chions, with irons on them. He could turn about as much as he liked, and was quite comfortable, but it was impossible for him to escape. The window I nailed up from the outside. I kept the key of the door in my pocket, and put my bed across it so that it could not be opened without pushing me on one side. I now considered that he was quite safe, but a few nights later I received a severe shock under the impression that he had again escaped. As what happened made us laugh a good deal at the time, I may as well tell it. The only way Tom could possibly get out of the room he was in was by breaking the window and jumping through it on to the verandah. To do this he would first have to get the irons off his legs, a feat which I considered impossible. Nevertheless I always went to bed rather in the expectation of hearing the

sound of glass breaking. Sure enough on the night in question after I had been asleep nearly an hour, I suddenly woke up with the sound of a tremendous smashing of glass in the next room. Immediately afterwards I heard feet running along the verandah, and then all was quiet again. I jumped out of bed and ran out, without opening the door into Tom's room, as I made up my mind that he had got out by the only possible way open to him. I took my revolver and fired it off in succession as quickly as I could to wake up the whole village. The men came running out of their houses to ask what was the matter, and I told them that Tom had again escaped, and urged them to surround the village as quickly as possible, as he could not as yet have had time to get out of it. For an hour and more we searched the bush with

torches, and at last I returned to Hawkins's house in a far from angelic frame of mind.

There, on the verandah was sitting Hawkins, in roars of laughter. A crowd of natives were around him, apparently not much amused, as they could see no fun in losing an hour's sleep for nothing. Through the open door I could see my bed pushed on one side, and in his little room was Tom sitting upon the floor also in roars of laughter.

'If you had not been in such a hurry,' said Hawkins, 'I might have saved you some trouble.'

'What was the meaning of all that noise then?'

'Well, the cat has been in the store, and knocked down a shelf full of bottles, and I expect the noise frightened the goats sleeping on the veran-

dah, and it was the goats you heard clearing out.'

No doubt this was the right explanation, for while we were talking, the goats returned to their accustomed position under Tom's window. No one apparently enjoyed this joke more than Tom himself.

No more incidents worthy of notice occurred during the rest of our stay in Wallis. I made expeditions all over the island, which is very beautiful. The conical mountain mentioned before was what I had supposed it to be, an extinct volcano. In the crater is a lake of mineral water which, though at least six miles from the sea, rises and falls with the tide. I was never tired of making shooting expeditions to this place, as the scenery and richness of the vegetation surpasses anything I had ever seen before. On the 21st of

March the cutter again made her appearance, Tom was sent on board, this time heavily ironed, the ship was properly provisioned, with much regret I said good-bye to Hawkins and his wife, and we made sail for Fiji.

After a rather long trip again, the result of Evans' uncertain navigation, we made one of the outlying islands, and in the morning of the next day we sailed into Levuka Harbour. Here the police boat came alongside, and with much satisfaction I handed over Tom, who was by the way an old member of that force, to their tender mercies. Our friends were very glad to see us in Fiji. We had been so long away without having been heard of that they feared the worst might have happened. Here for the present my connection with Tom ceases, but the most extraordinary part of the story is yet to come.

In Fiji, unfortunately, it was found impossible to try Tom. There had been no accommodation in the 'Thistle' for any of the witnesses, who remained in Rotumah. It became necessary then that he should be sent back to Rotumah for trial. The steamer 'Ocean Queen' was accordingly chartered to convey Mr. Gorrie, the Chief Justice, to that place, and Tom was also sent in her. At the trial, nothing new of any great importance transpired. In all essential points the evidence was the same as had been given before Gordon. I should perhaps have mentioned before that it was proved that Tom had had two or three glasses of gin in the night that the murder was committed. This fact had much to do in influencing the commutation of the sentence of death which was passed on him. There is no doubt that natives and half-castes are more

affected by a small quantity of drink than white men are. Tom made an able defence, laying great stress on the fact that some of the witnesses disagreed as to the clothes he had been wearing. The case, however, admitted of no doubt, and on May 18, 1880, the Chief Justice passed the sentence of death upon him. The 'Ocean Queen' returned to Fiji, and it remained to be seen whether the extreme penalty of the law would be carried out. As I have mentioned before, no motive had been discovered at that time for the crime; various motives had been suggested, but it was impossible to suppose that any of them could be the true one. This fact, taken in conjunction with that of his having been partially intoxicated, probably induced the Governor to commute the capital sentence, justly pro-

nounced, to one of twenty-one years' penal servitude.

This ends the story of the murder as far as Tom is concerned. Tom is now working on the roads in Fiji, and, if he survives the twenty-one years of his incarceration, will be an old man on his release.

I will conclude this part of my story by again alluding to Evans. On his arrival in Levuka, he found himself in great difficulties. He had broken the law by going to sea without a certificated mate. The ship had been chartered by a Levuka firm on the strength of his representations that the whole voyage would be accomplished in a month. He was also liable to be punished for his ill-treatment of the native crew under his command. A week after his arrival in Levuka he was found dead in his bed,

the cause of death being opium poisoning.

During the next six months of my life I was engaged in various colonial occupations. Gordon had left Rotumah, and returned to England. Another officer had been appointed temporarily to relieve him; but it was the intention of the Governor to send me there as Deputy Commissioner on the completion of my work in Fiji. An answer had been received from England agreeing to the annexation of the island, in compliance with the wishes expressed by the natives. On September the 18th, therefore, I went on board the 'Louisiana,' a schooner which had been chartered to take me there, and in four days my old home, Rotumah, was in sight. Mr. Murray, the officer appointed to act during Gordon's absence, was living at Noatau, and with him was living a Mr.

Allardyce who was engaged in studying the language. In two days' time Mr. Murray set sail for Fiji, and Allardyce stayed with me. The people were much pleased with the message I had to deliver to them concerning their annexation to Fiji.

It was now certain that, after the formal ceremony of hoisting the flag, which, as far as I knew then, was to take place in about six weeks' time, a resident magistrate would be appointed from Fiji to take up his abode in Rotumah permanently, after my own departure from the Island, on the completion of that ceremony. It was therefore necessary to have a good house built, and I decided on Alipati's town, Motusa, as the most suitable site. I had plenty of work to do arranging for the Governor's arrival, and introducing by degrees the more important native regulations of the Fijian code. The

six weeks had nearly elapsed, a huge flagstaff had been erected, the largest tree in the island had been sacrificed to furnish it, and two hundred natives had with difficulty brought it to the summit of the little hill which it was for the future to adorn. On the Governor's arrival two miles of the beach were to be lined with mats in order that until the completion of the ceremony his foot should not touch the ground. Great war dances were being rehearsed, big feasts prepared, and old native ceremonies, which had been for many years in disuse, were once more to be gone through in honour of the great occasion.

'L'Homme propose,' etc. Measles broke out in Levuka, where it was not likely to do much harm, as it had once before run through the entire population of Fiji. It had on that occasion made its appearance immediately after the ces-

sion of the colony to Great Britain, and over forty thousand natives, but not one single European, had died. The natives at that time naturally enough looked upon this terrible scourge as a punishment for giving up their country to the White Men. Rotumah had escaped, and if measles again had been introduced at the time of annexation, no power on earth would have persuaded the natives that it was not a just retribution on them.

To his intense annoyance therefore the Governor had to put off his visit, and for five months I stayed in Rotumah without any news from the outer world, including the infected country of Fiji. In two months after my arrival there I went into my new house. It was very large and luxurious. Every evening Alipati used to come and have a talk and smoke with me. It was always

open to any of my friends who cared to come. As I provided tobacco for them I seldom passed an evening by myself. The house was situated about 200 yards from Albert's—Alipati's—own house, and was just outside the limits of his town. A considerable clearing of four or five acres had been made in the bush to build it in. The short distance between the house and the village was of course very dark at night, as the path between them lay through a thick piece of bush. This sort of life went on with the exception of one break the whole time I was there.

Two days before Christmas Day I was left all alone by my accustomed friends in the house, and spent the evening by myself. Allardyce and I made some remarks about it, but attached no importance to it of any sort. Next day I went to the other end of

the island and did not come back till late. I had not seen Albert or any of his people during the day. In the evening I fully expected him up as a matter of course, but again no one made his appearance. I should have gone down myself to his house, as I thought that possibly a dance might be going on, which would account for no one making his appearance, but as it was raining heavily I did not go. I asked my native servants if anything was going on; they said there was no dance, and they did not know why Albert had not come. I saw by their manner that they knew something more, and I saw also that they were afraid to tell me what it was. I determined to see Albert early next day and find out everything from him. All that night we were annoyed by a harmless mad woman named Herena, who walked round

and round the house crying 'Kimueli —'Kimueli.' We thought nothing of it, as we were quite accustomed to her. Next day I went down early to Albert's house. He was just going out to his work in the bush. I said, 'Albert, why have you not been to see me for two nights?'

'Me 'fraid,' said Albert, 'dead man he walks.'

'What dead man?'

'Kimueli.'

Of course I laughed at him. It was an every-day occurrence for natives who had been out late at night in the bush, to come home saying they had seen ghosts. If I wished to send a message after sunset it was always necessary to engage three or four men to take it. Nothing would have induced any man to go by himself. The only man who was free from these

fears was my interpreter, Friday. He was a native, but had lived all his life among white people. When Friday came down from his own village to my house that morning, he was evidently a good deal troubled in his mind. He said—

'You remember that man Kimueli, Sir, that Tom killed.'

I said, 'Yes, Albert says he is walking about.'

I expected Friday to laugh, but he looked very serious and said—

'Every one in Motusa has seen him, Sir; the women are so frightened that they all sleep together in the big house.'

'What does he do?' said I. 'Where has he been to? What men have seen him?'

Friday mentioned a number of houses into which Kimueli had gone.

It appeared that his head was tied up with banana leaves and his face covered with blood. No one had heard him speak. This was unusual, as the ghosts I had heard the natives talk about on other occasions invariably made remarks on some common-place subject. The village was very much upset. For two nights this had happened, and several men and women had been terribly frightened. It was evident that all this was not imagination on the part of one man. I thought it possible that some madman was personating Kimueli, though it seemed almost impossible that any one could do so without being found out. I announced my determination to sit outside Albert's house that night and watch for him. I also told Albert that I should bring a rifle and have a shot, if I saw the ghost. This I said for the benefit of

any one who might be playing its part.

Poor Albert had to undergo a good deal of chaff for being afraid to walk two hundred yards through the bush to my house. He only said—

'By-and-bye you see him too, then me laugh at you.'

The rest of the day was spent in the usual manner. Allardyce and I were to have dinner in Albert's house; after that we were going to sit outside and watch for Kimueli. All the natives had come in very early that day from the bush. They were evidently unwilling to run the risk of being out after dark. Evening was now closing in, and they were all sitting in clusters outside their houses. It was, however, a bright moonlight night, and I could plainly recognise people at a considerable distance. Albert was getting very

nervous, and only answered my questions in monosyllables.

For about two hours we sat there smoking, and I was beginning to lose faith in Albert's ghost, when all of a sudden he clutched my elbow and pointed with his finger. I looked in the direction pointed out by him, and he whispered 'Kimueli.'

I certainly saw about a hundred yards off what appeared to be the ordinary figure of a native advancing. He had something tied round his head, as yet I could not see what. He was advancing straight towards us. We sat still and waited. The natives sitting in front of their doors got closer together and pointed at the advancing figure. All this time I was watching it most intently. A recollection of having seen that figure was forcing itself upon my mind more strongly

every moment, and suddenly the exact scene, when I had gone with Gordon to visit the murdered man, came back on my mind with great vividness. There was the same man in front of me, his face covered with blood, and a dirty cloth over his head, kept in its place by banana leaves which were secured with fibre and cotton thread. There was the same man, and there was the bandage round his head, leaf for leaf, and tie for tie, identical with the picture already present in my mind.

'By Jove it *is* Kimueli,' I said to Allardyce in a whisper. By this time he had passed us, walking straight in the direction of the clump of bush in which my house was situated. We jumped up and gave chase, but he got to the edge of the bush before we reached him. Though only a few yards ahead of us, and a bright moon-

light night, we here lost all trace of him. He had disappeared, and all that was left was a feeling of consternation and annoyance on my mind. We had to accept what we had seen; no explanation was possible. It was impossible to account for his appearance or disappearance. I went back to Albert's house in a most perplexed frame of mind. The fact of its being Christmas day, the anniversary of Tom's attack on Kimueli, made it still more remarkable.

I had myself only seen Kimueli two or three times in life, but still I remembered him perfectly, and the man or ghost, whichever it was who had just passed, exactly recalled his features. I had remembered too in a general way how Kimueli's head had been bandaged with rag and banana leaves, but on the appearance of this

figure it came back to me exactly, even to the position of the knots. I could not then, and do not now, believe it was in the power of any native to play the part so exactly. A native could and often does work himself up into a state of temporary madness, under the influence of which he might believe himself to be any one he chose, but the calm, quiet manner in which this figure had passed, was I believe entirely impossible for a native, acting such a part and before such an audience, to assume. Moreover Albert and every one else scouted the idea. They all knew Kimueli intimately, had seen him every day and could not be mistaken. Allardyce had never seen him before, but can bear witness to what he saw that night.

I went back to my house and tried to dismiss the matter from my mind,

but with indifferent success. I could not get over his disappearance. We were so close behind him, that if it had been a man forcing his way through the thick undergrowth we must have heard and seen him. There was no path where he had disappeared.

I determined to watch again next night. Till two in the morning I sat up with Albert smoking. No Kimueli made his appearance. Albert said he would not be seen again, and during my stay on the island he certainly never was. A month after this event I went on board a schooner bound for Sydney; my health had suffered severely, and it was imperative for me to go to a cooler climate. I can offer no explanation for this story. Till my arrival in England I never mentioned it to anyone; at the request of my friends, however, I now consent to publish it.

I am not a believer in ghosts. I believe a natural explanation of the story to exist, but the reader, who has patiently followed me thus far, must find it for himself, as I am unable to supply one.

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